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RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHRN  
DE RUEHMR #0152 1421449  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 211449Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3697  
INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE  
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 4116

UNCLAS MASERU 000152

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S, DS;

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO: BRAZEN CARJACKING AND FIREFIGHT STARTLES MASERU

REF: A) MASERU 142; AND B) MASERU 151

¶1. According to eyewitness accounts, at approximately 6:00 p.m. on the evening of Tuesday, May 20, there was a heavy exchange of gunfire near the Maseru Cathedral traffic circle in the central business of the capital city. Employees of a U.S.-based NGO located at an adjacent office building took cover at their offices during the barrage of shots. The representative of a local security firm subsequently informed Embaffs that a group of four armed men had attempted to carjack a private vehicle that had stopped in heavy traffic near the circle. After failing, one attacker pulled the driver of a nearby taxi out of his car, causing panic among the taxi's passengers and nearby pedestrians. Two off-duty soldiers in a small private truck exchanged considerable fire with the attackers, who escaped, and no injuries were reported.

¶2. COMMENT: There is currently no basis to link the May 20 carjacking attempt to a May 13 attack on military and police units (ref A) or a May 19 confrontation between taxi drivers and law enforcement authorities (ref B). These incidents have, however, cumulatively increased anxiety among local residents who perceive a recent sharp increase in criminal activity. Although carjackings occur in Lesotho, the brazen downtown armed attack on May 20 during rush hour is unusual. There is no evidence that U.S. interests or members of the international community have been targeted during these recent security incidents. Post nonetheless issued security and warden notices on May 21 informing mission staff and U.S. citizens of the carjacking event (most employees were already aware, following activation of the mission phone tree on the evening of May 20) and advising that driving be minimized after dark. END COMMENT.

MURPHY